



Chemical Officer Training: A Change for the Better

By Major Blaine Hedges and Captain Chuck Gutowski

Training for officers in the Chemical Corps has undergone many changes over the last few years. Changes to the Chemical Officer Basic Course (COBC) and the Chemical Captain's Career Course (CMC3), along with the incorporation of vertically integrated training (with emphasis on small-group and hands-on instruction), focus on lessons learned from recent conflicts to make officer instruction better for the student and our Army, while continuing to stay on the cutting edge of relevance.

Until recently, the training and support for COBC and CMC3 fell under two separate organizations—Alpha Company and Charlie Company of the 84th Chemical Battalion. Under the direction of the US Army Chemical School and the 3d Chemical Brigade chain of command, Charlie Company was deactivated in October 2003 and Alpha Company was designated as the team in charge of officer training. Additionally, the company commander position, traditionally filled by a major, is now a captain (as indicated on the table of distribution and allowances [TDA]). This change directs one field grade officer to

supervise the execution of training for both COBC and CMC3, which facilitated several changes to training. The section given this vital mission of training company grade chemical officers is called the Officer Training Department. To accommodate the structural changes, the 84th Chemical Battalion developed new course curriculums comprised of three phases: common core, battalion/brigade chemical officer, and platoon leader/company commander. These course flows align the start and graduation dates between COBC and CMC3—a critical factor in the synchronization of vertically integrated training. With these changes, the instructor positions—formerly a training, assessing, and coaching (TAC) instructor for COBC and a small-group leader (SGL) for CMC3—have been combined. The officers filling these roles are now called *small-group instructors* and work in three-person teams. The small-group instruction team in a vertically integrated training course consists of two captains and one noncommissioned officer, who are charged with training a COBC and CMC3 iteration simultaneously.

Vertically Integrated Training

The primary focus of vertically integrated training is the combination of COBC and CMC3 training events, where captains fill their future roles as company commanders and brigade chemical officers and lieutenants fill their corresponding platoon leader and battalion chemical officer positions. Under the guidance and supervision of small-group instructors and other permanent-party cadre, captains begin their training in the art of mentoring, teaching, and coaching lieutenants, while lieutenants begin to build trust, confidence, and working relationships with their future bosses. The Chemical School has executed one pilot course and is currently in the certification phase with a second course. The complete implementation of vertically integrated training will begin in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005.

There are currently nine vertically integrated training events: physical training, leader development (counseling), team building, the military decision-making process (Capstone), training management, change of command (responsibility) inventory, obscuration, flame field expedients, and a 10-day field training exercise (FTX) (Capstone). It would be too difficult and lengthy to describe all of the combined events, but here is an example using an FTX:

The CMC3 students receive a battalion operation order (OPORD) four weeks prior to execution and, in return, produce a company OPORD. The small-group instructors choose one CMC3 student to assume the duties of company commander. That individual issues the order to the COBC lieutenants three weeks prior to tactically moving to the field. The lieutenants then produce a platoon OPORD under the direction of the remaining CMC3 students. During this process, the CMC3 students are running tactical exercises without troops (focused on basic soldier tasks and drills) on the ground they will soon occupy. When in the field, there are three company commander positions and several platoon leader positions that students fill at all times. The CMC3 students who are not currently in command positions observe and evaluate the lieutenants in graded positions using evaluation sheets from Army training and evaluation program (ARTEP) manuals. During the course of the FTX, every student rotates through at least one leadership position.

Small-Group Instruction

US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) regulations state that in order to facilitate a small-group environment, there should be a ratio of no more than 16 students per instructor. Decreasing the size of groups increases the amount of “face time” each student receives with the instructor. This maximizes the students’ opportunities for hands-on training, while allowing the instructors to better assess the individual strengths and weaknesses of their students. With seven COBC classes each year, averaging 40 to 50 students per class, it is impossible for permanent-party personnel to field these requirements without help. The scenario



Students work in a small-group environment.



Students perform hands-on training during the radiation staff officer phase.

for vertically integrated training facilitates a level of training previously unattainable. Besides the changes already mentioned, the following changes have been incorporated into chemical officer training over the last two years:

COBC
Emphasis has been placed on hands-on practical exercises (as opposed to slide show presentations).
All lesson plans have been rewritten.
Hazardous-material (HAZMAT) training (full-range chemistry [toxic industrial materials and chemicals], sensitive-site exploitation, and HAZMAT awareness and operations) has been incorporated into the curriculum.
Scenarios have been rewritten to reflect updates in the contemporary operational environment.
The FTX focus has been expanded to include basic soldier skills (Warrior Ethos).
The M16 weapon qualification now includes night fire and nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) fire.
Familiarization with the joint warning and reporting network has been incorporated into the curriculum.
The time spent on the unit status report has been increased.
The Web page < www.wood.army.mil/84chem/COBC/ACO.htm > has been expanded to provide tools for platoon leaders and battalion chemical officers in the field. A survey is also provided for students to provide feedback so that we may continuously update the course materials. Tools not authorized due to disclosure issues are posted on the Army Knowledge Online Web site < www.us.army.portal/portal_home.jhtml >.

CMC3
Combined Arms and Services Staff School (CAS3) critical tasks have been incorporated in the FY 05 course flow. Since Fort Leavenworth no longer conducts the CAS3 course, all critical tasks that were not redundant have been integrated into the CMC3 curriculum.
The master level concept has been incorporated. Incoming students are responsible for knowing the information taught in COBC. Redundant information between the courses has been reduced to allow time for more technical chemical and biological instruction.
An entry level knowledge requirement has been implemented. Precourse examinations now ensure that students are prepared to further their education. Students not displaying proficiency of previously taught subjects are required to complete retraining exercises to refresh applicable skills before receiving new and more advanced materials.
Force XXI Battle Command–Brigade and Below (FBCB2) familiarization training on actual systems has been incorporated into the course curriculum.
The Maneuver Control System (MCS)–Light (the next phase of computer-based familiarization training) is projected for course integration in FY 05.
The Pea Ridge staff ride has been incorporated into the course curriculum. The overnight staff ride, which builds on the knowledge gained from the COBC staff ride to Wilson's Creek Battlefield, focuses on the campaign for control of the state of Missouri during the Civil War.
All lesson plans have been rewritten.
The Web page < www.wood.army.mil/84chem/CMC3_New/welcome_page.htm > has been expanded to include tools for company commanders and brigade officers. This page also provides a survey link for course feedback, and comments are always welcome.

Conclusion

The improvements to our chemical courses ensure that training remains on the cutting edge, providing the best training and instruction for the future leaders of our Chemical Corps and Army. Remember, your input is vital for us to remain pertinent in the current and future force structures. If you see something in the field that you believe we should be teaching or can improve on, or if you have questions, please feel free to contact the Officer Training Department at (573) 596-0131, extension 37713. Our mission is to prepare our company grade officers for their future missions.

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Captain Gutowski is a small-group instructor at the US Army Chemical School. He has assisted in the planning and execution of vertically integrated training since its conception. He has instructed COBC and CMC3 since January 2003.